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THE STATE LIBRARY

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IV THE STATE LIBRARY

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This chapter nominally reports on the State Library for the year ending September 30, 1911. Actually it deals with but the latter half of this year, for on March 29th the library was almost totally destroyed by fire. All records, statistics, correspondence and data from which might have been prepared a futile report for the first six months, perished with the books and manuscripts they would have recorded and described.

The catastrophe is probably the greatest in modern library annals. The burning of the Kaiserliche Universitäts und Landes Bibliothek in Strassburg during the Franco-Prussian war did not destroy so many books. The fire at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Turin (1904) was notable for the large number of rarities and manuscript treasures lost, though no more, numerically, than 25,000 books and 2000 manuscripts were destroyed. The combined library losses at San Francisco in 1906, while perhaps aggregating nearly half a million volumes, were not comparable in the character of the books and manuscripts burned, for the entire Bancroft Library and a great part of the Sutro collection escaped. At Albany a round half million of books, three hundred thousand manuscripts, the costly apparatus of administration, the whole representing the skilled and devoted labors of many faithful and zealous library workers during almost a century — all these, forming a collection ranking with the first half dozen in the western hemisphere and among the first twenty in the world, were swept away in a few hot and disheartening hours. The work of a great going concern — a work reaching not alone into every corner and county of the State, but through correspondence, publications and exchange into every part of the world — a work of educational extension, of instruction, book acquisition, and service, was cut off between two days. The fact that within a stone's throw of the fire stood a superb new building almost ready to receive the library and to protect it from just the catastrophe which overtook it and which had been dreaded for so many years, gives a touch of unusual tragedy to the situation. The fire, resulting from

an all-night legislative caucus in the Assembly chamber, got a good start in a part of the Capitol at that hour scantily furnished with watchmen and with wholly inadequate fire protection. By the time it broke into the neighboring rooms of the State Library it was so fierce that the library fire apparatus was powerless. Once in the library quarters thoroughgoing disaster was inevitable, for despite repeated emphatic and plain-spoken warnings during the past fifteen years from those having charge of the State Library, the State had made no suitable provision for the safety of the collection of books, and conditions had been allowed to grow up which invited the very calamity which befell.

It is hard to see how there could ever be a more potent argument for the segregation of great libraries in buildings built to house libraries and administered by those having libraries actively in charge, than is afforded by this fire when all the circumstances which were responsible for it are taken into account. The conditions which permitted it to gain serious headway and which seemed powerless to arrest its rapid spread were those arising directly from the partisan system of administering and caring for public buildings, a system which keeps veterans in responsible positions of watch and guard until they are seventy-five or eighty years old, which is a stranger to fire drills and sufficient patrol and which must always fail of effective esprit de corps. The plain lesson for libraries from the New York State Library fire is that no valuable collection of books should be housed in a building occupied, administered and cared for as are undoubtedly all of the state capitol buildings in the country.

Any definite or comprehensive statement of losses would be little less than a full catalog of the various collections. Such a statement has been, and will be, attempted only for the manuscripts. It is printed in the Journal of the Board of Regents for June 22, 1911 and will be reprinted with inevitable corrections in the detailed Report of the State Library for 1911. What remained to the Library after the fire may, by now, be pretty accurately stated as follows:

Books saved belonging to the State Library proper, including those in hands of borrowers.	7 000
Traveling library books loaned throughout the State including several hundred books for the blind	45 000
Manuscripts saved	80 000

Including 45 manuscripts of unusual rarity and renown which are particularly described in the Regents Minutes for June 22, 1911

Duplicates stored in other buildings 200 000

These are being sorted and will yield many thousands of volumes for the new library

Several hundred coins and a few relics, notably those relating to Washington

Almost immediately after the fire the Library secured the use of temporary quarters in different parts of the city. The Division of Educational Extension and the Library School are now located in the Guild House of the Cathedral of All Saints. The work of caring for the recovered manuscripts is being done at the Catholic Union, at which building also the sorting of duplicates is carried on. Each of these enterprises will be the work of many months. The medical librarian is located in a room on the third floor of the building at 240 Washington avenue, where the current medical journals are made available to physicians. Two members of the library staff are at the State Normal College. Thousands of duplicates are still stored in the attic of the Senate chamber. The administrative, buying and cataloging departments of the Library, with the larger part of its staff, occupy the building at 162 State street. These scattered quarters will be occupied until the new building is ready, and its near completion with such substantial promise of satisfactory accommodations, does much to reconcile us to the present serious loss of administrative efficiency.

These temporary quarters secured, the work of restoration was begun. The manuscript salvage, rescued at no slight personal danger while the fire was yet burning, was given first attention. Those saved had mostly been mounted on heavy sheets with wide margins and bound into volumes of varying sizes. The covers and edges of these were without exception charred and blackened, and in nearly every case the volume was more or less water-soaked. The first step was to remove all covers. Each volume was then taken apart leaf by leaf, and each sheet was laid between print paper for drying. After twenty-four hours every leaf was again handled and placed between heavy blotting paper; after twenty-four hours here, each leaf was again removed to a second blotting paper. At all of these stages pressure was applied to facilitate the drying and keep the documents from wrinkling.

With the first few volumes handled, each leaf was put into a bath of clear water and a camel's-hair brush applied to remove dirt. It was soon found that this took too much time to apply to all manuscripts and that they would mold and mildew if faster progress was not made. The bath was therefore omitted with the greater part of

the manuscripts treated, and the camel's-hair brush was applied dry, and such dirt as could be removed was taken off in this way.

When each leaf had thus passed through these three drying processes, those belonging to the same volume were collected and carefully tied up in boxes or separate packages to wait until all the manuscripts were thus treated. The manuscripts were first saved from fire and water. The race through the ensuing two weeks to save them from mold and mildew was quite as keen and hard.

When all are dried, the manuscripts will be sorted into volumes, a slow matter, as but one or two persons are enough acquainted with them to be able to tell just which documents belong together. The rarest pieces will then be mended, nearly all will be covered with crêpe, all will be mounted on fresh paper and carefully bound into new volumes. The archivist estimates that this work will keep a dozen or fifteen people busy for about a year.

This work, as described above, was initiated under the direction of Mr William Berwick, expert in manuscript restoration, who came to us for ten days from the Library of Congress. Mr Berwick not only personally organized our work, but has given the archivist and certain members of our staff explicit directions as to its prosecution to completion.

The drying, cleaning and rebinding of the books saved presented varied and difficult questions. Many rescued from the ruins proved to be odd volumes of sets, or too badly damaged to be worth keeping; many single volumes, sometimes whole sets, were discarded as being palpably more costly to rebind than to replace.

Some faint notion may be had of the tangle into which the business affairs of the Library were plunged when it is recalled that as all records of outstanding orders were destroyed, there was no way of knowing how many thousands of dollars worth of books the Library was obligated for or how many and what books had been received and not paid for at the time of the fire. Hundreds of unknown "continuation" orders were cut off in mid-sets, and even after agents had furnished lists of these orders it was hard to decide wisely which to cancel or continue. The burning of all numbers for the first three months of the year, of more than 3000 periodicals currently received broke 3000 volumes, many of them difficult to restore. All mailing and exchange lists showing what State publications were sent to and received from hundreds of institutions in all parts of the world were likewise burned and restored only by laborious correspondence. These incidents are cited

merely as typical of hundreds which arose during the months following the fire.

Following the hundreds of immediate expressions of sympathy has come a steady stream of substantial gifts to the Library from every part of the world: from nations, states, cities, libraries, publishers, institutions, and individuals. Specific public acknowledgments for these can not now be printed (this will be done elsewhere hereafter), but a general acknowledgment must be made here not only for the thousands of books actually received but for the other thousands offered which, while it has not yet been possible to receive them, will nevertheless be most welcome as soon as additional facilities for storage enable the Library to send for them. The books themselves are no more keenly prized and appreciated than are the messages of sympathy and encouragement which invariably accompany them.

One of the largest problems to settle at once involved the system of classification and cataloging. With the slate wiped clean, with practically every book burned and every catalog card destroyed or burned beyond further use, the situation was that which would confront a new library about to organize. The factors affecting decision were varied, involving the purpose and scope of the new Library, its various lines of coordinate work, such as the Library School and the Division of Educational Extension, its relation to all library and educational endeavor throughout the State, a relation which it is hoped to make even closer than before. The generosity of the Legislature has provided a sum which makes it possible to plan for an organization and a work greater in scope and promise than that which existed before the fire. The new quarters will afford opportunities for useful expansion, and the reconstruction of records and bibliographic and technical equipment has been planned with this large view in mind. Such a plan for a library of this size is necessarily complex, far more minute and intricate than would suffice for smaller libraries. It will be fully described in the separate report of the Library for 1910-11.

Naturally, after doing what was possible to restore a semblance of organization and carry on the pressing work both usual and unusual which followed the fire, the most important consideration was a program for restoring the library. An adequate new building was already nearly complete, an expert staff, loyal and tried, was at hand. Public sentiment expressed by press and people was quick and unanimous to urge a new and greater library. The one requi-

site was money. Representations to the Governor and Legislature that a million and a quarter dollars should be named by the State as the sum it was willing to spend at once to provide a new State Library, not only met with no opposition but with definite approval and encouragement. A bill was early introduced into the Legislature naming this amount of money and, after some vicissitudes, which never at any time challenged the wisdom and propriety of the measure, was finally passed. The provisions of this bill contemplate (chapter 901, Laws of 1911) the expenditure of a million and a quarter dollars within four or five years, certainly as fast as it can be spent wisely. While this sum will not represent the money value of the books destroyed, it is certain that it will found for the State a great library, and that the expenditure of it within a comparatively brief term of years will give a unity and balance to the collection which is inevitably lacking in any library that has grown up through a century. It will provide a collection of books worthy of the setting which the State has made for them in the new building.

The question of ways and means being thus happily disposed of, a well considered plan became necessary, and the following statement of the proposed scope of the new library has been prepared.

SCOPE OF THE STATE LIBRARY

It is not planned to make the New York State Library a great general library. It is, however, to be a great reference library, zealously specializing in certain subjects. Though it will have some books on most subjects, it can not undertake to collect all the books or even all the important books on all subjects.

The immediate, definite constituency of the Library is of course the Legislature, the courts and the departments of the State government with their employees. In recent years as the business of the State has increased and the conception of the functions of the State has enlarged, the range and volume of the official demands made upon the State Library have steadily become broader and greater. It is expected that this will continue. It must be abundantly provided for.

A remoter but possibly an even more important constituency of the Library is steadily developing in every part of the State. Every school, every library, and all of the culturing, commercial, professional, and industrial activities in the State are depending upon and becoming, in effect, branches of the State Library. Through them any individual citizen may expect to find the unusual book

not found in local collections. It is the business of the State Library to serve and encourage all such agencies and activities.

The Library will, from the first, pay special attention to the following subjects, and in these subjects will aim to make its collections preeminent.

GENERAL REFERENCE BOOKS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

All strictly "reference books" in all subjects in the general acceptance of the term. Complete sets of periodicals and all reference books which are indexed in the chief general indexes to English and American journals. The publications of learned societies with particular attention to those on the subjects in which the Library is to specialize.

Bibliography in a very broad sense: books about books, the history of printing, examples of early printed books, of notable bindings, of books from famous presses, of exceptional typography. Library history, administration and publications.

LAW

All American, British and colonial official, unofficial, side and local court reports. All series of selected cases or cases covering special topics. American, British and colonial statute law. All law periodicals in the English language, with a selection from those in other languages.

Digests, tables of cases, citation books and all legal bibliographic apparatus necessary to the convenient and exhaustive study of case law.

Legal encyclopedias and dictionaries, American textbooks in all editions, legal history and biography, literature of the law, international law, constitutional law, trials.

Reports of American bar associations and legal societies.

Such of the statute law and legal literature of foreign countries as will be useful to our State courts and departments in passing upon foreign questions coming before them, and to the Legislature for a comparative study of legislation.

MEDICINE

Complete sets of all important medical serials, transactions of medical academies and societies, bulletins from hospitals, public health reports, vital statistics.

Important cyclopedias, handbooks, reference works and texts, and of less use but surely claiming a place, the literature recounting

the history and development of the medical sciences and the lives of famous physicians.

HISTORY

The standard histories of all countries, with special attention to those European nations which were early or active explorers of America, which were colonizers of this country and which have left traces upon our government, people and institutions.

Americana will be collected with zeal and in the broadest sense of the term, emphasizing strongly the thirteen original colonies.

The collection of books and manuscripts relating to New York State must, of course, be the best in the country.

Local history, geography, travels, cartography, American Indians, American imprints before 1800, New York imprints before 1825, American newspapers before 1850, American biography and genealogy, with so much of English and foreign genealogy as shall be necessary to trace immigrant ancestry, are some of the collateral historical subjects which will have attention.

American literature to be principally represented by first and notable editions of the standard authors.

EDUCATION

The State Library is a part of the State Education Department, the Regents of the University are its trustees, and it is thus directly associated with the administrative educational offices of the State and all of the State's marvelous educational activities. There are more than 50,000 teachers in the State and the people expend more than \$80,000,000 each year for schools. Surely the State Library must make its collections on educational theory and practice as complete and as useful to the thousands of educational officers, teachers and students throughout the State as is possible. Schools, colleges, and universities, public and private, in all parts of the country are urged to send to the Library as full sets as possible of their reports, catalogs and publications.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

The Library must have extensive collections on social, economic and political science; industrial history; statistics. In this field lie the political and economic questions which are the subjects of legislation and of State regulation or control. On such topics for example as Elections, Suffrage, Labor, Taxation, Banking and finance, Municipal government, Conservation, Public utilities, Insurance, Charities, no pains will be spared to build up notable collections.

TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING

The Library will aim to secure all useful and important journals in this field and will more particularly notice topics which relate to activities or enterprises in which the State is engaged; canals, railroads, highways, water storage, agriculture, public health and the engineering phases of the utilities regulated by the Public Service Commissions.

SCIENCE

Beyond the fundamental general reference material, the State Library will specialize in science only so far as may be necessary to serve such agencies or departments of the State government as are doing scientific work. Good working collections will be made in geology, zoology, entomology, botany, with more particular attention to the economic phases of these subjects, and in chemistry as related to agriculture, the arts and commerce.

MANUSCRIPTS

Besides the manuscript archives, which in accordance with law are from time to time transferred to the State Library by other State departments, the Library will secure all important private manuscripts that can be obtained relating to the history of the State and to the lives of its public men. Extensive collections of letters are specially desirable and the appropriateness of depositing them in the State Library is suggested to families in which such collections exist.

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

As complete a set as possible of the printed documents of the United States Government both in the collected and departmental editions.

The same for every state in the Union. At this point many other state libraries have been prompt with offers of substantial help, which will be freely availed of as occasions for it arise.

The collected edition when issued (otherwise the separate editions) of the documents of every American city with more than 25,000 population, and for all counties, cities and incorporated villages in New York State.

THE FUTURE

Since the fire it has, of course, been impossible to attempt any public service in the State Library proper. The Division of Educational Extension, with the 45,000 books saved from the fire, has

continued its work with surprising efficiency when it is considered that its stock of books was cut in two, and every scrap of correspondence and records destroyed. The library for the blind has gone on in much the same way. The Library School has continued, with somewhat restricted book facilities now being rapidly repaired, but without serious interruption and in much the usual way. The Library proper, however, has found it impossible to open any reading rooms, to do any reference work by mail, to make available in any degree either the books that were saved or those that have come in by gift and purchase since the fire. It will be impossible to attempt any work of this kind until the library shall be opened in the new building. So far as this can be definitely planned in advance, it would seem that October 1, 1912, should find all parts of the library gathered together in the new building and every part of its public work resumed. This does not at all mean that everything necessary to do this in the old-time efficiency will have been done. In the face of such large book purchases as the Library will make, there will be large arrears of cataloging for several years, and this will inevitably restrict the most effective use of some books. Certain important card catalogs and indexes which were destroyed in the fire can not be replaced at once; such, for example, as the index to the collected documents of the State; the comparative index to American statute law, covering the past twenty years; the card index of book notes and reviews, and of course the great card catalog of the library itself, which, had it been saved with all the books destroyed, would still have been a valuable piece of bibliographic apparatus of the highest usefulness in creating and administering the new library.

It is but six months since the fire, yet not too soon to see encouraging signs of a great library rising from the ashes of the old. The Empire State has set its approving seal upon an adequate initial appropriation. A splendid new home will be ready for its books and tenants in a few months. A staff of nearly one hundred people, recently tested in a most trying and unusual way, stands ready to repeat the remarkably rapid and substantial recovery of the past six months and to occupy the "promised land" with a considerable library and an effective organization for its conduct.

LIBRARY SCHOOL

The State Library School lost all administrative records and correspondence covering the quarter century of its existence. Of its

bibliographic and practice collections of nearly 10,000 volumes, its unrivaled collection of pictures and plans of library buildings, fittings and appliances, not a vestige remains. But recovery was quick and the serious effects of the shock only temporary. Very fortunately most of the technical courses requiring extensive use of books were either completed or nearing completion, so that it was possible to finish the year profitably with a much smaller collection of books than would have been required at any earlier date. It was, moreover, early enough in the year to permit the collection of equipment necessary for the school year of 1911-12.

The regular schedule was continued almost without interruption until the end of the year, only the day immediately following the fire being taken as an enforced holiday. Through the courtesy of the libraries visited, the annual library trip (to New York, Philadelphia, Washington and their vicinities) was put two weeks earlier than the dates first agreed upon. This permitted the temporary quarters in the science wing of the State Normal College to be put in readiness by the time the school returned from its trip and allowed time to collect the absolute essentials for the rest of the school year. Through the courtesy of Dr Herbert Putnam the senior class was enabled to finish the courses in subject bibliography and history of libraries in the Library of Congress.

The courage and zeal of the faculty and the admirable spirit displayed by the students prevented even a temporary panic. Through the cooperation of the Normal College authorities practice work in several technical lines was provided in the Normal College library.

General and genuine interest in the school and its work was shown by the prompt offers of assistance received from libraries throughout the State, among them the public libraries of Buffalo, Gloversville, Utica and Brooklyn, and Columbia University, and every public library in Albany. Several of the libraries mentioned above offered temporary quarters for the school in addition to general assistance. Some fifteen prominent libraries have also agreed to give opportunities for practice work in the spring of 1912 to the students entering in October 1911, and several of the largest libraries of the country have agreed to lend for limited periods necessary books formerly in the State Library but too scarce to be duplicated on short notice. A very fair working collection of professional literature has already been assembled through the generosity of former students and friends of the school, and the State Library is able to provide all books needed for the school year 1911-12. The

classes of 1898 and 1901 have contributed \$126 to be used for additional equipment. While the ingenuity of the faculty may be somewhat taxed in adjusting themselves to changed conditions, there is no reason apparent why the development of the school should be in any way retarded by the misfortunes of the year.

On account of lack of room the summer session was postponed until 1912.

Forty-one students were registered in the regular school and four members of the New York State Library staff also took partial work. Twelve students received the degree B.L.S. and twenty-six certificates were issued to students completing the first year's work.

Nearly a hundred new positions (including important promotions) were filled during the year by former students of the school. The importance of many of these positions and the fact that in many cases library boards are seeking for school-trained librarians to succeed librarians trained entirely through experience are testimonials not merely to the work of our own school but the growing belief in the efficacy of systematic instruction in library methods in general.



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